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Printed on Mar 18, 2021

City's Hospital Setup Clouds Aid

By TERRY GANEY
Jefferson City Correspondent
of the Post-Dispatch

JEFFERSON CITY — If St. Louis continues to run two inefficient public hospitals, the city's hospital subsidy appropriations may run into trouble in the Legislature, Rep. Steve Vossmeyer told a St. Louis official Thursday.

Vossmeyer, D-St. Louis, made the assessment Thursday afternoon after his subcommittee board from John O'Shaughnessy, St. Louis hospital commissioner. O'Shaughnessy appeared before Vossmeyer's appropriations subcommittee on social services to explain how the city relies on the state for parts of its hospital budget.

"Why are we subsidizing two facilities when it appears by doing so we're helping to bankrupt the city?" Vossmeyer asked.

O'Shaughnessy explained that Mayor Jim Conway was going through a "tortuous" decision-making process over whether to consolidate services from Homer G. Phillips Hospital at City Hospital. He said, however, that St. Louis deserved its fair share of Medicaid and state subsidy money whether or not it operated one or two city hospitals.

St. Louis hospital officials are seeking $2.9 million in state hospital subsidy funds that have been held up by the Missouri Board of Health. The board has refused to pay until the city documents how previous hospital subsidy funds have been spent.

But O'Shaughnessy said if the state provided the documentation, the city would open itself up to the potential loss of between $400,000 to $800,000 in federal Medicare funds. He said federal officials would count the state's subsidy as a gift to the city. Thus, under the federal government's very complex formula, all sources of funds are considered before payments are made. Thus, O'Shaughnessy said, his early estimate is the $400,000 minimum loss in the city's share of Medicare reimbursement funds.

Kansas City encountered the same problem and it cost that community $220,000 this year, O'Shaughnessy said.

"The point that is disturbing to us is that money the Legislature wanted to give to us ends up being sent back to the feds," O'Shaughnessy said. "I think it's the intent of the Legislature not to substitute the state money for other federal money."

Rep. Wes Miller, R-Washington, told O'Shaughnessy that even if the city had to repay some of its Medicare money, it would be better off than having to do without the state subsidy as it's doing now.

"We've just poor enough that if we're going to go broke we're going to go good and broke," O'Shaughnessy replied. "We're going to dig in our heels and fight about it."

City representatives have also been trying to get state Social Services Department officials to let go of more Medicaid funds for the city's long-term care facilities, the Truman Restorative Center and Koch Hospital.

They won a partial victory Feb. 8 when Gov. Joseph P. Teasdale reversed an earlier administrative decision that reduced the state's Medicaid subsidy to the two facilities in proportion to the amount the city funded them with local revenue. That change enabled the state to pay the city $6 million in back Medicaid payments.

City officials are also trying to get the state to change its classification system upon which the Medicaid reimbursement rates are set. The change would put the two St. Louis facilities into a special category allowing for higher Medicaid reimbursement rates.

The state funds are needed before the city's fiscal year ends April 30 to provide a balanced budget. Jack A. Webber, St. Louis budget director, has said the money is needed to plug an expected $16 million budget gap.

Vossmeyer said O'Shaughnessy's testimony "confirmed our worst fear that there's some money being wasted."

He said there would probably be some legislators who would question paying state funds for facilities that are only 35 percent and 45 percent occupied.

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS: Bob Bollot (top) speaking at a protest meeting about a proposed budget cut at the University of Missouri at St. Louis that may reduce classes. Other students are John Walker and Elizabeth Schmidt. (Post-Dispatch Photo by Jim Forbes)

Aldermen Defeat April 3 Vote On Separate Fire Department

By DAVID FINK
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

A deeply split Board of Aldermen today defeated a strong attempt by the city firefighters union to place on the April 3 city election ballot a proposed City Charter amendment to create a separate Fire Department.

In a 13-12 vote, the board defeated a motion to send notice to the Board of Election Commissioners that a committee had defeated the bill last week. The notice would have implied that no further action would be taken. If the motion had passed, the Election Board would have been required to put the Fire Department question on the ballot April 3.

The board's vote, which came after nearly two hours of parliamentary maneuvering and intense lobbying, was met with an immediate pledge by the president of the firefighters union to file a suit to put the question on the April 3 ballot.

"By their action today, the aldermen could cost the taxpayers $75,000 to $100,000 for a special election," said Donald Blackwell, president of Local 73 of the International Association of Fire Fighters. "Our lawyers will file suit against the Board of Aldermen, the Board of Election Commissioners and anyone else responsible for forcing the taxpayers to bear the cost and burden of a special election."

The April election will be the last regularly-scheduled municipal election until August 1980. If the Fire Department question is not on the April ballot, the union will press for a special election.

The union, which represents about 600 of the city's 826 firemen, collected more than 25,000 signatures to place the issue on the ballot. They want the Fire Department removed from the control of the city's Director of Public Safety — whom they say has interfered in the past with firefighters efforts and the department's professionalism — and placed under the fire chief, who would become a member of the Board of Public Service.

But both Mayor Jim Conway and Public Safety Director Alphonso Jackson contend that the petition drive is racially-inspired because both Jackson and his predecessor, Joseph W.B. Clark, now welfare director, are black.

Percich Seeks Return Of $25,000 Legacy

By DAVID FINK
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Comptroller Raymond T. Percich is demanding that a private foundation at City Hospital return $25,000 that Percich says belongs to the city.

The money was bequeathed to City Hospital four years ago by a woman whose brother had been a patient there years before.

The money went to the Foundation for the Preservation of Health. Its attorney, Thomas Lake, says the check was made out to Dr. R. Dean Wochner, city health and hospitals director, who endorsed it over to the foundation.

Percich's demand is part of an investigation of the foundation by his office; he has hired a firm to audit the foundation's records. He seized the records last week after testimony before a special aldermanic committee looking into the hospital system.

Percich said the matter might go to court, and he declined to elaborate. But the Rev. Dr. David Spooner, president of the foundation and the hospital's Protestant chaplain, confirmed that he had gotten a letter from Percich demanding the return of the money.

The money has been set aside for a future project and still is available, Spooner said. But interest from the money has been used to buy land near City Hospital for a parking lot, he said.

Some hospital equipment also has been purchased with the interest money, Spooner said.

The foundation has held dinner dances, raffles, crafts fairs and carnivals to raise money for hospital projects. But several of those events raised the ire of the aldermanic committee last week.

The aldermen were especially irked by testimony that the hospital dining room had been used for dinner dances. Spooner confirmed in an interview that the city had not been paid for use of the room, but said the city had been paid for the food.

"Everything we have done has been out in the open," Spooner said. He said any mistakes were "strictly unintentional" and added, "Some of the things the foundation has purchased have made our employees feel good. If that's wrong, I don't know what to do."

Spooner and Lake said they would have to discuss Percich's demand before taking a position. Lake said the question seems to be whether "money that is left to the hospital must go through city offices."

UMSL Students Assail Proposed Cuts In Budget

Education at the University of Missouri at St. Louis is jeopardized by budget cuts proposed by Gov. Joseph P. Teasdale, a student group says.

Some of the 40 students at a rally Thursday said that the resulting staff cuts and class cancellations will mean many will be unable to complete their educations as planned.

"Many students here have to arrange their class schedules around jobs," said John Walker, one of the student leaders. "If they (university officials) begin cutting classes and faculty members, those students may have serious problems finding classes when they need them and may end up having to stay in school longer."

The four-campus university system has asked the Legislature for $157 million, an increase of 13.8 percent from last year. Teasdale has recommended $146 million.

UMSL is "already at the bare-bones minimum," Walker told the students. "With cuts like this, what is to keep us from becoming just another junior college?" The students agreed to circulate petitions and to write to their legislators. They plan to meet again at 2 p.m. Thursday.

Captain Killed Fighting House Fire

By MARJORIE MANDEL
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Chesterfield Fire Capt. Raymond F. Trog Jr. was killed today while fighting a three-alarm fire that destroyed a home at 14508 Agusta Drive in Chesterfield.

Patrolman Wayne Neidenberg of the St. Louis County Police Department said Trog, 27, was fighting the fire at the home of Harvey C. Rosen about 2:10 a.m. when the den floor collapsed under him. Trog fell into the basement and part of the floor fell on top of him.

Firemen were unable to reach Trog for about an hour because the flames were so high and because of heat and smoke, Neidenberg said.

Chesterfield Fire Chief George Bellamy said the flames were so dense firefighters could not see Trog and did not hear him call out.

When firefighters finally beat the flames back enough to enter the basement, they found Trog lying in a corner, Bellamy said. Trog was pronounced dead on arrival at St. Luke's Hospital West, apparently of smoke inhalation.

Neidenberg said the fire broke out about 2 a.m. in the one-story brick and frame ranch-style house. Rosen told police that he believed the fire started when sparks from a fireplace in the den ignited carpeting nearby. A smoke detector sounded and Rosen, his wife and two children got out of the house safely.

Bellamy said the cause of the fire was under investigation by district officials and by the state fire marshal's office.

Chesterfield firemen were assisted by firefighters from the Manchester, Creve Coeur and Ballwin fire protection districts in fighting the blaze, which was brought under control several hours later.

Trog had been hired by the Chesterfield Fire Protection District when he was 18 and was "very eager" to work as a fireman, Bellamy said. After working as a firefighter for several years, Trog joined the Air Force, and after a four year enlistment, returned to the fire district about three years ago.

"He worked his way up to a captain when he was still very young," Bellamy said. "He had a lot going for him."

Trog came from a family of firefighters. His father, Raymond Sr., is assistant chief of the Frontenac Fire Department, and his brother, Robert, 25, is a Frontenac fireman.

"There's a lot of tears around here today," said Frontenac Fire Capt. Phil Sonderman. "With a family of three firemen, you always expect something like this could happen, but still, when it does ..."

Trog, who lived at 1404 Trails Drive, Fenton, is survived by his wife, Claudett, and two children, Scott, 8, and Timothy, 7.

Woman In Bomb Plot Case Is Granted A New Trial

By MARJORIE MANDEL
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Leigh Ann Steinkoetter of south St. Louis County has been granted a new trial on charges arising from a plot to kill her stepmother by planting a bomb in her Paducah, Ky., residence.

The 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati reversed the conviction because of "highly prejudicial prosecutorial misconduct." The court said that the U.S. attorney may have prejudiced the case by referring to South County bombings in his opening statement to the jury. The trial judge ordered the jury to disregard the statement, but the court of appeals said that was insufficient.

Last year investigators studied whether Mrs. Steinkoetter's husband, John, had been involved in the St. Louis bombings in which two persons were killed. He was never charged in connection with those bombings.

No date has been set for Mrs. Steinkoetter's new trial.

In February 1978, Mrs. Steinkoetter, 46, of the 4500 block of Blairmont Terrace, was charged along with her husband with three counts: Possessing a bomb, transporting it in interstate commerce, and transporting it with the intent of killing Mrs. Steinkoetter's stepmother, Gladys Walden.

A pipe bomb was discovered in Mrs. Walden's garage last February. Mrs. Steinkoetter acknowledged during her first trial that she accompanied her husband to Paducah on New Year's Eve 1977, when the bomb was planted.

But she testified that she had accompanied her husband only because he had forced her to go after he had threatened her life and the lives of their children.

The prosecution attempted to show that Mrs. Steinkoetter was an active participant in a plot to kill Mrs. Walden to inherit her estate.

Mrs. Steinkoetter was convicted in June on one count, possessing a bomb, and sentenced to eight years in prison. A mistrial was declared on the other two counts when the jury was unable to reach a verdict. In a retrial in August, she was convicted on the other two counts.

Steinkoetter was sentenced in June to 16 years in prison after pleading guilty to all three counts.

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STAY OF EXECUTION: The Executive Committee of the Greater St. Louis Health Systems Agency has postponed until April 5 a decision on whether to recommend that Christian Welfare Hospital of East St. Louis be allowed to close. The committee debated the matter for about an hour Thursday, with dozens of East St. Louis residents listening. The Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board, which will make the final decision, had agreed to postpone its own consideration of the matter until May. Harold G. Baker, an attorney who represents the owners, requested the delays because of illness.

COUNTERFEITING INDICTMENT: Daniel A. Sciacia of St. Louis has been indicted on four counts of passing counterfeit $10 bills. Sciacia, 22, of the 2800 block of January Avenue, was named Thursday in an indictment handed up by a U.S. District Court grand jury. The grand jurors alleged that he passed the bills shortly before Christmas at two service stations, a fast-food restaurant and an auto parts store. If convicted on all counts, Sciacia faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison and fines totaling $60,000.

Reader's Advocate

Readers with questions, comments or complaints relating to the Post-Dispatch are invited to get in touch with Jim Fox, the Reader's Advocate.

Letters may be addressed to him at the Post-Dispatch, 900 North Twelfth Boulevard, St. Louis, 63101, or he may be reached by telephone Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m.

Telephone numbers or 421-1111, ext. 250 or 251, and 241-2964.

Lottery Winners

PERU, Ill. (UPI) — Here are the results of the drawing Thursday, March 1, in the Illinois Lottery:

Big Pay Day
Numbers: 844, 25, 5 and 8108.

Treasure Hunt
Numbers: 32, 33, 31, 06, 39 and 45.

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